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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4225
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 0070
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1124
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1183
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1074
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0057
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0267
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 5253
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0889
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0682
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3254
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE (BENEDICT, SAINZ, ENGLISH), S/WCI

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SUBJECT: UIGHURS ARRIVE IN ALBANIA FROM GUANTANAMO WITHOUT
INCIDENT

REF: BEIJING 8334

Classified By: Ambassador Marcie B. Ries, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) On May 5, at 9:03 PM local time, five Chinese-national Uighurs previously held at Guantanamo Bay who had been determined to no longer be enemy combatants arrived by C-17 at Mother Teresa International Airport in Tirana. The five Uighurs were driven to Rinas police station (near the airport), where a senior Minister of Interior official oversaw the processing of their entry documents and asylum claim forms. The Uighurs were then driven to the National Accommodation Center for Asylum Seekers, in Babrru, near Tirana, run by the Ministry of Interior in conjunction with the UNHCR. All events went smoothly and according to plan. The Uighurs were generally cooperative and appeared satisfied, if somewhat confused, about being in Albania. Government of Albania cooperation throughout was excellent.

¶2. (C) Sabin Willett, the US attorney for two of the five Uighurs, who had been pursuing a civil action in a Washington, DC District Court seeking their release from Guantanamo, arrived in Albania May 7. Shortly afterward, Willett contacted Post, and spoke to DCM via telephone. Willett said he was in Albania to check on the Uighurs' condition and their treatment. He indicated that he was generally pleased that the GoA had accepted the Uighurs, but intended see them personally and speak to GoA officials before completing his assessment. Willett said he held hope that some of the remaining Uighurs now in Guantanamo might also be released in Albania. According to Willett, head of the Uighur association in the US, Nury Turkel, hoped to arrive in Tirana on May 9. (Note: We understand Turkel's travel may be more complicated because he has no passport -- he renounced his original Chinese citizenship, and now has a US Green Card, but not US citizenship. End Note.)

13. (C) DCM offered Willett assistance in connecting with GoA officials to arrange a meeting with the Uighurs, which Willett accepted. DCM arranged to follow up with Willett the morning of May 8. Nonetheless, Willett did not wait and went to the Center seeking to see the Uighurs the evening of May 7, but was turned away by an official who did not know he was coming.

4, (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador May 8, Minister of Interior Olldashi said he had met Willett on Sunday and personally arranged for him to visit the refugee center later on May 8. Willett arrived at the center around noon and left with all five Uighurs for lunch outside, followed by a swarm of TV reporters. As of this writing (14:00 local time) neither Willett nor the Uighurs have made any statement to the press, although we believe some statement, particularly from Willett, is likely.

15. (SBU) Press reporting on May 6 of the Uighurs' arrival was generally straightforward and factual, with some discussion of the humanitarian angle. On May 7, Gazeta Shqiptare picked up a story of Italian news agency ANSA which quoted an "Asian diplomat" in Tirana as saying "It is like Albania gave political asylum to five Taliban. What would Washington say in that case?" Gazeta Shqiptare commented, "There is no doubt we are a friend of the U.S., but we risk spoiling our relations with China, an important UNSC member." One May 7 editorial by a sensationalistic journalist said that although siding with the US on a number of political and military issues was appropriate, it is now time for Albania to establish some "limits and standards" in pursuing Albanian national objectives. The editorial claimed that the Uighurs brought here were at the top of the global terror network,

and bringing them to Albania put the country at unnecessary risk, and could create a crisis with China.

16. (C) Comment: So far, things have gone well with the Uighur resettlement here, and the GoA seems satisfied with developments. The Albanian press, which almost never criticizes the US, has run several stories questioning whether Albania's acceptance of the Uighurs is really in the country's interest, and expressing particular concern about the impact this might have on relations with China. The story has been receding from the headlines.

17. (C) Comment (cont'd): There has been no known Chinese reaction here so far, apart from the hazy reported remarks above attributed to an Asian diplomat. Given Chinese concern about the Uighur issue (reftel), some response is likely. The Albanian Foreign Minister told Ambassador that the only concern that the GoA had regarding China was that China might retaliate by vetoing UN action granting Kosovo (90% of the population of which is ethnic Albanian) its independence.

18. (U) On May 5 at 22:15, immediately upon completion of the Uighurs' document, the Albanian MFA released the following statement:

BEGIN TEXT OF MFA STATEMENT

Today, on May 5, 2006, five Chinese citizens entered the territory of the Republic of Albania and applied for asylum in Albania.

Albanian authorities, in compliance with Article 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, with the Geneva Convention "On Refugee Status" of 1951 and the New York Protocol of 1976, as well as the Law No. 8432 of 14.12.1998, "On Asylum in the Republic of Albania," accepted the application of the asylum seekers and will continue with the relevant legal procedures regarding applications for asylum.

END TEXT OF MFA STATEMENT

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